



Harl McDonald

Volume Three



Producer's Note

For this third and final volume in Pristine's series devoted to the music of Harl McDonald, we turn primarily to live performances of works which were never recorded commercially. His hauntingly melodic Violin Concerto, which had its première the day before the broadcast heard here, shows the influences of several late Romantic composers (Elgar, Sibelius and Rachmaninov among them). The soloist is the Philadelphia Orchestra's concertmaster, Alexander Hilsberg.

The next selection offers an opportunity to hear a McDonald work in progress. Before he included the "Elegy and Battle Hymn" in his symphonic suite *My Country at War* (reissued on Pristine PASC 430), it was a stand-alone work with a baritone soloist. The text ("Tall youth, with all of life and living stretched before you/Destroyed, destroyed by treachery") was based on an essay by Edward Gilson, and deals with the surprise attack on America by the Japanese at Pearl Harbor and the promise of retribution to come. The broadcast heard here was the world première performance conducted by Fabien Sevitzyky, who had previously introduced the "1941" movement of *My Country*.

The next work suggests an unexpected connection. A cycle of sorrowful songs based on the works of a Chinese poet, translated in the composer's vernacular – could his Third Symphony be Harl McDonald's *Das Lied von der Erde*? Unlike the Mahler work, however, there is no pentatonic *Chinoiserie* here; McDonald was not out to stress the cultural origins of his text. "My object," he wrote in a program note for the work's première, "was to uncover in the poems four phases of tragedy that were unlimited by racial conventions or literary styles and to concentrate on the subject matter which seemed universal." Leopold Stokowski introduced the piece with the Philadelphia Orchestra in January, 1936, and the Ormandy performance heard here was given the year after McDonald's death as a tribute by the orchestra to its longtime former manager.

While Mahler may not have been the antecedent for the Third Symphony, Copland was the likely inspiration for the final work on our program, the only studio recording here, and the last one made by the composer. The cantata *Builders of America* expands on the model of *Lincoln Portrait* by adding a chorus and focusing on two Presidents. The sung text was based on a poem by Edward Shenton, expanded to include a narration authoritatively declaimed here by actor Claude Rains. The recording was made less than a week after the work's première during a session otherwise devoted to the Philadelphia Orchestra, and the "Columbia Chamber Orchestra" may well include members of that ensemble. (The solo flautist certainly seems to have William Kincaid's trademark vibrato.) With the exception of two additional recordings of works which had previously been set down on disc (a 1953 taping of *From Childhood* conducted by Felix Slatkin, and a 1996 version of "Fiesta" from *San Juan Capistrano* with Keith Lockhart and the Boston Pops), *Builders of America* would bring to a close the discography of the works of Harl McDonald. **Mark Obert-Thorn**

PASC 491

PRISTINE AUDIO

the music of harl mcdonald

volume three



violin concerto
elegy and battle hymn
symphony no. 3
builders of america

the philadelphia orchestra · eugene ormandy
indianapolis symphony orchestra · fabien sevitzyky
columbia chamber orchestra · harl mcdonald

Obert-Thorn

live & studio recordings · 1943-1956

mcdonald

the music of harl mcdonald vol 3

COMPACT
disc
DIGITAL AUDIO
PASC 491

Producer and Audio Restoration
Engineer: Mark Obert-Thorn

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noise reduction (Track 10): Andrew Rose

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Cover artwork based on a photograph of Harl
McDonald & Eugene Ormandy

McDONALD Violin Concerto (1943)

- 1 1st Mvt. - Allegro moderato (8:13)
- 2 2nd Mvt. - Andante (6:41)
- 3 3rd Mvt. - Allegro moderato (4:30)

Alexander Hilsberg *violin*

The Philadelphia Orchestra *Eugene Ormandy*

McDONALD Elegy and Battle Hymn (1942)

- 4 Elegy (7:23)
- 5 Battle Hymn (5:10)

George Newton *bass-baritone*

Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra *Fabien Seitzky*

McDONALD Symphony No. 3, "A Tragic Cycle"

(Lamentations of Fu Hsuan) (1935)

- 6 1st Mvt. - Molto adagio - Molto agitato (13:03)
- 7 2nd Mvt. - Adagio maestoso (6:41)
- 8 3rd Mvt. - Marziale con ismania (4:00)
- 9 4th Mvt. - Molto adagio - Molto agitato (8:09)

Emelina De Vita *soprano*

Philadelphia Orchestra Chorus *William R. Smith (director)*

Musical Art Society of Camden *Henry Smith (director)*

The Philadelphia Orchestra *Eugene Ormandy*

McDONALD Builders of America (Washington and Lincoln) (15:23)

Claude Rains *narrator*

Columbia Chamber Orchestra and Chorus *Harl McDonald*

Violin Concerto
Live recording, 17 March 1945
Academy of Music, Philadelphia
Elegy and Battle Hymn
Live recording, 28 January 1943
Murat Theatre, Indianapolis
Symphony No. 3
Live recording, 17 November 1956
Academy of Music, Philadelphia
Builders of America
Recorded 26 April 1953
Academy of Music, Philadelphia
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